The VALIANTS of VIRGINIA

By HALLIE ERMINIE RIVES

ILLUSTRATIONS by LAUREN STOUT

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SYNOPSIS.

John Valiant, a rich society favorite, suddenly discovers that the Valiant corporation, which his father founded and which was the principal source of his wealth, had failed. He voluntarily turns over his private fortune to the receiver for the corporation. His entire remaining possessions consist of an old motor car, a white bull dog and Damory court, a neglected estate in Virginia. On the way to Damory court he meets Shirley Dandridge, an auburn-haired beauty, and decides that he is going to like Virginia immensely. Shirley's mother, Mrs. Dandridge, and Major Bristow exchange reminiscences during which it is revealed that the major, Valiant's father, and a man named Sassoon were rivals for the hand of Mrs. Dandridge in her youth. Sassoon and Valiant fought a duel on her account in which the former was killed. Valiant finds Damory court overgrown with weeds and creepers and decides to rehabilitate the place. Valiant saves Shirley from the bite of a snake, which bites him. Knowing the deadliness of the bite, Shirley sucks the poison from the wound and saves his life. Valiant learns for the first time that his father left Virginia on account of a duel in which Doctor Southall and Major Bristow acted as his father's seconds. Valiant and Shirley become good friends. Mrs. Dandridge faints when she meets Valiant for the first time. Valiant discovers that he has a fortune in old walnut trees. The yearly tournament, a survival of the jousting of feudal times, is held at Damory court. At the last moment Valiant takes the place of one of the knights, who is sick, and enters the lists. He wins and chooses Shirley Dandridge as queen of beauty to the dismay of Katherine Fargo, a former sweetheart, who is visiting in Virginia. The tournament ball at Damory court draws the elite of the countryside. Shirley is crowned by Valiant as queen of beauty. Valiant tells Shirley of his love and they become engaged. Katherine Fargo, determining not to give up Valiant without a struggle, points out to Shirley how terrible it would be for the woman who caused the duel to meet Valiant, who looks so much like his father. Shirley, uncertain, but feeling that her mother was in love with the victim of Valiant's pistol, breaks the engagement. Greef King, a liberated convict whom Major Bristow had sent to prison, makes threats against his prosecutor. Valiant pleads with Shirley, but fails to persuade her to change her decision. Major Bristow is fatally wounded by Greef King, but before dying he confesses to Mrs. Dandridge that he had kept a letter Valiant had written to her after the duel.

CHAPTER XXXI.—Continued.

In the little haircloth trunk back in her room lay an old scrap-book. It held a few leaves torn from letters and many newspaper clippings. From these she had known of his work, his marriage, the great commercial success for which his name had stood—the name that from the day of his going, she had so seldom taken upon her lips. Some of them had dealt with his habits and idiosyncrasies, hints of an altered personality, and aloofness or loneliness that had set him apart and made him, in a way, a stranger to those who should have known him best. Thus her mind had come to hold a double image: The grave man these shadowed forth, and the man she had loved, whose youthful face was in the locket she wore always on her breast. It was this face that was printed on her heart, and when John Valiant had stood before her on the porch at Rosewood, it had seemed to have risen, instinct, from that old grave.

He had not kept silence! He had written! It pealed through her brain like a muffled bell. But Beauty Valiant was gone with her youth; in the room near by lay that old companion who would never speak to her again, the lifelong friend—who had really failed her thirty years ago! . . . and in a tin box a mile away lay a letter. . . .

"He won't rouse again," the doctor

He Went Upstairs, Into the Bedrooms One by One.

had said, but a little later, as he and Valiant sat beside the couch, the major opened his eyes suddenly.

"Shirley," he whispered. "Where's Shirley?"

She was sitting on the porch just outside the open window, and when she entered, tears were on her face. The doctor drew back silently; but when Valiant would have done so, the major called him nearer.

"No," he panted; "I like to see you two together." His voice was very weak and tired.

As she leaned and touched his hand, he smiled whimsically. "It's mighty curious," he said, "but I can't get it out of my head that its Beauty Valiant and Judith that I'm really talking to. Foolish—isn't it?" But the idea seemed to master him, and presently he began to call Shirley by her mother's name. An odd youthfulness crept into his eyes; a subtle paradoxical boyishness. His cheek flamed with color. The deep lines about his mouth smoothed miraculously out.

"Judith," he whispered, "—you—sure you told me the truth a while ago, when you said—you said—"

"Yes, yes," Shirley answered, putting her young arm under him, thinking only to soothe the anxiety that seemed vaguely to thread some vague hallucination.

He smiled again. "It makes it easier," he said. He looked at Valiant, his mind seeming to slip farther and farther away. "Beauty," he gasped, "you didn't go away after all, did you! I dreamed it—I reckon. It'll be—all right with you both."

He sighed peacefully, and his eyes turned to Shirley's and closed. "I'm—so glad," he muttered, "so glad I—didn't really do it, Judith. It would have—been the—only—low-down thing—I—ever did."

The doctor went swiftly to the door and beckoned to Jereboam. "Come in now, Jerry," he said in a low voice, "quickly."

The old negro fell on his knees by the couch. "Mars' Monty!" he cried. "Is you' gwine away en leabe ol' Jerry? Is yo'? Mars'?",

The cracked but loving voice struck across the void of the failing sense. For a last time the major opened his misting eyes.

"Jerry, you—black scoundrel!" he whispered, and Shirley felt his head grow heavier on her arm. "I reckon it's—about time—to me going—home!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

Renunciation.

The grim posse that gathered in haste that afternoon did not ride far. Its work had been singularly well done. It brought back to Damory court, however, a white bulldog whose broken leg made his would-be joyful bark trail into a sad whimper as his owner took him into welcoming arms.

Next day the major was carried to his final rest in the myrtled shadow of St. Andrew's. At the service the old church was crowded to its doors. Valiant occupied a humble place at one side—the others, he knew, were older friends than he. The light of the late afternoon came dimly in through the stained-glass windows and seemed to clothe with subtle colors the voice of the rector as he read the solemn service. The responses came brokenly, and their were tears on many faces.

Valiant could see the side-face of the doctor, its saturnine grimness strangely moved, and beyond him, Shirley and her mother. Many glanced at them for the major's will had been opened that morning and few there had been surprised to learn that, save for a life-annuity for old Jereboam, he had left everything he possessed to Shirley. Miss Mattie Sue was beside them, and between, wan with weeping, sat Rickey Snyder. Shirley's arm lay shelteringly about the small shoulders as if it would stay the passion of grief that from time to time shook them.

The evening before had been further darkened by the child's disappearance and Miss Mattie Sue had sat through half the night in tearful anxiety. It was Valiant who had solved the riddle. In her first wild compunction, Rickey had gasped out the story of her meeting with Greef King, his threat and her own terrorized silence, and when he heard of this he had guessed her whereabouts. He had found her at the Dome, in the deserted cabin from which on a snowy night six years ago, Shirley had rescued her. She had fled there in her shabbiest dress, her toys and trinkets left behind, taking with her only a string of blue glass beads that had been Shirley's last Christmas present.

"Let me stay!" she had wailed. "I'm not fit to live down there! It's all my fault that it happened. I was a coward. I ought to stay here in Hell's-Half-Acre forever and ever!" Valiant had carried her back in his arms down the mountain—she had been too spent to walk.

He thought of this now as he saw that arm about the child in that protective, almost motherly gesture. It made his own heartache more unbearable. Such a little time ago he had felt that arm about him!

He leaned his hot head against the cool plastered wall, trying to keep his mind on the solemn reading. But Shirley's voice and laugh seemed to be running eerily through the chanting lines, and her face shut out pulpit and lectern. It swept over him suddenly that each abominable hour could but make the situation more impossible for them both. He had seen her as she entered the church, had thought her even paler than in the wood, the bluish shadows deeper under her eyes. Those delicate charms were in eclipse.

And it was he who was to blame!

It came to him with a stab of enlightenment. He had been thinking only of himself all the while. But for her, it was his presence that had now become the unbearable thing. A cold sweat broke on his forehead. ". . . for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner; as all my fathers were. O spare me a little, that I may recover my strength before I go hence. . . ." The intoning voice fell dully on his ears.

To go away! To pass out of her life, to a future empty of her? How could he do that? When he had parted from her in the rain he had felt a frenzy of obstinacy. It had seemed so clear that the barrier must in the end yield before their love. He had never thought of surrender. Now he told himself that flight was all that was left him. She—her happiness—nothing else mattered. Damory court and its future—the plans he had made—the Valiant name—in that clarifying instant he knew that all these, from that May day on the Red road, had clung about her. She had been the inspiration of all.

"Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom—"

The voices of the unveiled choir rose clearly and some one at his side was whispering that this had been the major's favorite hymn. But he scarcely heard.

When the service was ended the people filled the big yard while the last reverent words were spoken at the

She Tried to Imagine That Letter's Coming to Her—Then. Thirty Years Ago!

grave. Valiant, standing with the rest, saw Shirley, with her mother and the doctor, pass out of the gate. She was not looking toward him. A mist was before his eyes as they drove away, and the vision of her remained wavering and indistinct—a pale blurred face under shining hair.

He realized after a time that the yard was empty and the sexton was locking the church door. He went slowly to the gate, and just outside some one spoke to him. It was Chisholm Lusk. They had not met since the night of the ball. Even in his own preoccupation, Valiant noted that Lusk's face seemed to have lost its exuberant youthfulness. It was worn as if with sleeplessness, and had a look of suffering that touched him. And all at once, while they stood looking at each other, Valiant knew what the other had waited to say.

"I won't beat about the bush," said Lusk stammering. "I've got to ask you something. I reckon you've guessed that I—that Shirley—"

Valiant touched the young fellow's arm. "Yes," he said, "I think I know."

"It's no new thing, with me," said the other hoarsely. "It's been three years. The night of the ball, I thought perhaps that—I don't mean to ask what you might have a right to resent—but I must find out. Is there any reason why I shouldn't try my luck?"

Valiant shook his head. "No," he said heavily, "there is no reason."

The boyish look sprang back to Lusk's face. He drew a long breath. "Why, then I will," he said. "I—I'm sorry if I hurt you. Heaven knows I didn't want to!"

He grasped the other's hand with a man's heartiness and went up the road with a swinging stride; and Valiant stood watching him go, with his hands tight-clenched at his side.

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A little later Valiant climbed the sloping driveway of Damory court. It seemed to stare at him from a thousand reproachful eyes. The bachelor red squirrel from his tree-crotch looked down at him askance. The redbirds, flashing through the hedges, fluttered disconsolately. Fire-Cracker, the peacock, was shrieking from the upper lawn and the strident discord seemed to mock his mood.

The great house had become home to him; he told himself that he would make no other. The few things he had brought—his books and trophies—had grown to be a part of it, and they should remain. The ax should not be laid to the walnut grove. As his father had done, he would leave behind him the life he had lived there, and the old court should be once more closed and deserted. Uncle Jefferson and Aunt Daphne might live on in the cabin back of the kitchens. There was pasturage for the horse and the cows and for old Sukey, and some acres had already been cleared for planting. And there would be the swans, the ducks and chickens, the peafowl and the fish.

A letter had come to him that morning. The corporation had resumed business with credit unimpaired. Public opinion was more than friendly now. A place waited for him there, and one of added honor, in a concern that had rigorously cleansed itself and already looked forward to a new career of prosperity. But he thought of this now with no thrill. The old life no longer called. There were still wide unpeopled spaces somewhere where a man's hand and brain were no less needed, and there was work there that would help him to bear, if not forget.

He paced up and down the porch under the great gray columns, his steps spiritless and lagging. The Virginia creeper, trailing over its end, waved to and fro with a sound like a sigh. How long would it be before the lawn was once more unkempt and draggled? Before burdock and thistle, mullein and Spanish-needle would return to smother the clover? Before Damory court, on which he had spent such loving labor, would lie again as it lay that afternoon when he had rattled thither on Uncle Jefferson's crazy hack? Before there would be for him, in some far-away corner of the world, only Wishing-House and the Never-Never Land?

In the hall he stood a moment before the fireplace, his eyes on its carven motto, "I clinge:" the phrase was like a spear-thrust. He began to wander restlessly through the house, up and down, like a prowling animal. The dining-room looked austere and chill—only the little lady in hoops and love-curls who had been his great-grandmother smiled wistfully down from her gilt frame above the console—and in the library a melancholy deeper than that of yesterday's tragedy seemed to hang, through which Devil-John, drawing closer the leash of his leaping hound, glared sardonically at him from his one cold eye. The shutters of the parlor were closed, but he threw them open and let the rich light pierce the yellow gloom, glinting from the figures in the cabinet and weaving a thousand tiny rainbows in the prisms of the great chandelier.

He went upstairs, into the bedrooms one by one, now and then passing his hand over a polished chair-back or touching an ornament or a frame on the wall: into The Hilarium with its records of childish study and play. The dolls stood now on dress-parade in glass cases, and prints in bright colors, dear to little people, were on the walls. He opened the shutters here, too, and stood some time on the threshold before he turned and went heavily downstairs.

Through the rear door he could see the kitchens, and Aunt Daphne sitting under the trumpet-vine piecing a nine-patch calico quilt with little squares of orange and red and green cloth. Two diminutive darkies were sprawled on the ground looking up at her with round serious eyes, while a wary bantam pecked industriously about their bare legs.

"En den whut de roostah say, Aunt Daph?"

"Ol' roostah he hollah to all he wifes, Oo—ooo! Oo—ooo! Young Mars' come!—Young Mars' come! Young Mars' come!' En dey all mighty skeered, 'case Mars' John he cert'n'y fond ob fried chick'n. But de big tukkey gobbler he don' b'leeve et 'tall. 'Doubtful—doubtful—doubtful!' he say, lak dat. Den de drake he peep eroun' de cornah, en he say, 'Haish! Haish! Haish!' Fo' he done seed Mars' John comin', sho' nuff. But et too late by den, fo' Aunt Daph she done grab Mis' Pullet, en Mars' John he gwineter eat huh dis bery evenin' fo' he suppah. Now you chillun runs erlong home ter yo' mammies, en don' yo' pick none ob dem green apples on de way, neidah."

It was not till after dark had come that Valiant said goodby to the garden. He loved it best under the starlight. He sat a long hour under the pergola overlooking the lake, where he could dimly see the green rocks, and the white froth of the water bubbling and chuckling down over their rounded outlines to the shrouded level below. The moon lifted finally and soared through the sky, blowing out the little lamps of stars. Under its light a gossamer mist robed the landscape in a shimmering opalescence, in which tree and shrub altered their values and became transmitted to silver sentinels, watching over a demesne of violet-velvet shadows filled with sleepy twitterings and stealthy rustlings and the odor of wild honeysuckle.

At the last he stood before the old sun-dial, rearing its column from its pearly clusters of blossoms. "I count no hours but the happy ones:" he read the inscription with an indrawn breath. Then, groping at its base, he lifted the ivy that had once rambled there and drew up the tangle again over the stone disk. His Bride's-Garden!

In the library, an hour later, sitting at the big black pigeonholed desk, he wrote to Shirley:

"I am leaving tonight on the midnight train. Uncle Jefferson will give you this note in the morning. I will not stay at Damory court to bring more pain into your life. I am going very far away. I understand all you are feeling—and so, goodby, goodby. God keep you! I love you and I shall love you always, always!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Voice From the Past.

Though the doctor left the church with Shirley and her mother, he did not drive to Rosewood, but to his office. There, alone with Mrs. Dandridge while Shirley waited in the carriage, he unlocked the little tin box that had been the major's, with the key Mrs. Dandridge gave him, and put into her hands a little packet of yellow oiled-silk which bore her name. He noted that it agitated her profoundly and as she thrust it into the bosom of her dress, her face seemed stirred as he had never seen it. When he put her again in the carriage, he patted her shoulder with a touch far gentler than his gruff goodby.

At Rosewood, at length, alone in her room, she sat down with the packet in her hands. During the long hours since first the little key had lain in her palm like a live coal, she had been all afire with eagerness. Now the moment had come, she was almost afraid.

She tried to imagine that letter's coming to her—then. Thirty years ago! A May day, a day of golden sunshine and flowers. The arbors had been covered with roses then, too, like those whose perfume drifted to her now. Evil news flies fast, and she had heard of the duel very early that morning. The letter would have reached her later. She would have fled away with it to this very room to read it alone—as she did now!

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Value of Talk.

Talk has the reputation of being the cheapest thing there is. As supply and demand have something if not all to do with values, doubtless the supply of talk is what gives it a bargain counter value.

Things that are cheap lack enduring quality.

If talk were confined to the things done more than to the thing said, it would have a greater value.

Some one asked Edison if he experienced much inconvenience on account of his deafness. He replied that he thanked God for it every day, since it protected him from the distracting effect of other people's talk. He could thus live his own life, think his own thoughts, do his own work in his world of silence.

REALLY USED COTTON BALES

Popular Idea Concerning Battle of New Orleans Has Been Found to Be Correct.

Interest in the slumbering cotton-bale theory of the battle of New Orleans was aroused by the finding of a water-color picture map of the original battle plan in an abandoned trunk in the cellar of the St. Charles hotel. Little is known about the drawing or the other contents of the trunk which has remained unnoticed for years in a dark corner.

Five veterans of the battle have added their signatures to the remarkable map to attest the fact that it is a true representation of the battle plan as made under the direction of Andrew Jackson by his military engineer, H. Laclotte. It shows a line of cotton bales which a marginal note says was 1,000 feet long with a prolongment extending 600 feet into the woods. Some historians deny the story about the use of cotton bales.

The five veterans who say they fought behind cotton bales were Joseph St. Cyr, Jean Lamothe, P. M. Lapice, Charles Raymond and Jean Gervais. Pen pictures of these men appear in the footnotes.

The finding of the picture is timely, says the New Orleans Item, as it will be of service for the staging of the battle, which is to be one of the leading features of the Exposition of Big Ideas.

Translator of "Arabian Nights."

The "Arabian Nights" did not become familiar to Europeans until 1704, when Galland translated them into French. Scholars cast doubt on the authenticity of some of Galland's work, accusing him—like Fits-Gerald and Omar Khayyam—of inventing rather than translating, but with the public the success of the tales was immediate and immense. Galland used to complain that the students, returning home in the early hours of the morning, would knock at his door and demand the recitation of a tale.

HOW HE TURNED THE TRICK

After This, Mr. Mordical Hammerfest Must Be Credited With Knowing a Thing or Two.

Mrs. Mordecai Hammerfest turned pale as her husband entered the dining-room for breakfast.

"Mordy!" she gasped. "Do you—don't you feel well?"

"Perfectly," he replied in seeming surprise.

"But—but, are you in your—your underduds!"

"Tell me something I don't know. Pass the butter, please," said Mr. Hammerfest.

She passed the butter, remarking nervously: "But, Mordy, dear, as you came in I saw you didn't have any shoes on."

"Well, what of it. Your hair is in curl papers, isn't it?"

"Why—y-yes."

"And you have on a wrapper, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then."

And he went on eating his breakfast in silence except when he asked her to pass the butter. Then he went upstairs and finished dressing, and the next morning and on succeeding mornings she reported for breakfast in regular clothes.

Sporting Instinct Aroused.

The street-corner orator had gathered around him a group of urchins. Why they listened so attentively he didn't understand; nor probably did they know themselves. Simply nothing doing. But the orator took full advantage of his opportunity and delivered an improving lecture on the value of kindness to dumb animals. At the end he sought for some illustration to point the moral and adorn the tale. It was there at hand. Across the way walked a lady, leading two little dogs in leash. The one was black and the other white. "Now," exclaimed the tub-thumper, "after what I have said, supposing those two dear little dogs were to start fighting, what would be the first thing you would do?" No answer came at first; but one little arab turned to look at the dogs critically and thoughtfully. "Well guv'nor," he answered, at last, "I fink I'd 'ave tuppence on the little black 'un!"

Marriage Causes False Fire Alarm.

Seven minutes of blasts from the whistle of the Passaic Metalware company, in honor of the marriage of the daughter of the superintendent, recently turned out five volunteer fire departments. The fog made the whistle audible in Rutherford, Nutley, Belleville, Garfield and Clifton and the firemen rushed to headquarters at the alarm.

It took half an hour to determine where the whistling came from. The wedding which caused the commotion united Miss Sallie Karp, 217 Brook avenue, Passaic, to Michael F. Bernan.—New York Mail.

Bless the Ladies.

"Our congressional committee heard 30 ladies in two hours. That many men could have kept us listening for several days."

"That shows that women can transact public business. But how did they manage to crowd 30 speeches into two hours?"

"Oh, they spoke three and four at a time."—Kansas City Journal.

Oh, That Way!

"It's such a silly superstition to be always picking up pins!"

"You may call it a superstition if you wish, but I know a chap who makes about $6 a week by doing it."

"How can a fellow gather that many?"

"He works in a bowling alley."—Judge.